

VZCZCXRO9675

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RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHSL #0256/01 1171541
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 271541Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0891
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000256

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA RELIGIOUS ROUND UP APRIL 27, 2007

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 100

[1](#)B. BRATISLAVA 21

THE 18th RELIGION: THE BAHAI COMMUNITY

[1](#)1. (U) On April 19, the Ministry of Culture registered the Bahai Community as the 18th recognized religion in Slovakia. The Bahais are the last faith to receive recognition under the existing law, which requires a petition of 20,000 signatures of resident supporters (though not necessarily members or believers) of the religious group. The Bahais, who number approximately 200-300 in Slovakia, spent several months collecting signatures. With registration comes such benefits as the right to form a legal entity, open a bank account, purchase property for a place of worship, officiate legally-binding wedding ceremonies, perform official visits to members in jail or hospital, and more. The government is obliged to offer to pay the salaries of clergy within the community. However, the Bahais will not accept this monetary benefit. Shortly after registration, a leading weekly magazine published an article about the Bahai faith which was generally positive and accurate.

PRESIDENT SIGNS RESTRICTIVE RELIGIOUS REGISTRATION BILL

[1](#)2. (U) On March 29 by a vote of 108-1 with eight abstentions, parliament passed an amendment to the religious registration procedures which will require 20,000 members (vice just supporters) of the religious faith to submit an "honest declaration" (similar to a notarized statement) in order for the group to register (ref A). There is not yet an interpretation of the law to determine if the 20,000 "declarations" can be provided in a single petition or if each declaring member must submit an individual document. In addition to support for the religion's registration, the members must also declare that they know articles of faith and basic tenets of the religion. President Gasparovic signed the amended bill three weeks after parliament approved it. The signed bill will become law when it is published in the official gazette, expected in early May.

SLOVAK MUSLIMS DISSATISFIED, DIVIDED

[1](#)3. (SBU) Some members of the local Muslim community feel that the new, more restrictive registration requirements are directed at them. One spokesperson believes that the phrasing in the new legislation about "articles of faith" is taken almost word-for-word from Slovak translations of Muslim texts. (COMMENT. This might not be the case. A Slovak Lutheran minister noted that the wording is also similar Lutheran texts. Regardless, numerous Embassy officers and FSNs have heard some MPs and other officials make anti-Muslim remarks in connection with this legislation. END COMMENT.)

14. (SBU) According to contacts in the Muslim community as well as news sources, the approximately 5000 members of the Slovak Muslim community have halted their attempts to register their faith. (NOTE: Official census figures for resident Muslims are considerably lower, about 1200. END NOTE.) The community is divided into two groups which disagree on the next steps forward. Some have formed an NGO with the intention to educate Slovaks about Islam. Some parts of the Muslim community have started accepting external donations, even some who previously did not agree with this measure. Before the registration attempt was put on hold, the Muslim community and the Institute for Church-State Relations had worked on a plan to determine the level of financial support that Muslims would be entitled to after registration. The now-dormant plan had proposed that the salaries of six imams would be sufficient to serve the community.

AMBASSADOR HOSTS INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE IN PRESOV

15. (U) On April 12 in Presov, an eastern Slovak town that is a historic center for several Slovak religious groups, the Ambassador hosted an inter-faith dialogue. Representatives of various Christian denominations (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox) participated, as did a representative of the Bahai faith. Participants discussed the positive relations that most religious organizations have with each other in Slovakia, attempts to reach out to youth, community service projects, and relations with Romani communities and church members.

16. (SBU) Discussion about Islam by most of the participants was subtly negative. One participant offered the opinion that Islam lacks a concept of universal love, which he said is a basic Christian concept. Another said that he had had

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only negative experiences with Muslims so far. Despite this, the collected group acknowledged that they needed more information about Islam and Muslims and suggested that this is an area where the U.S. Embassy could help. (NOTE: A spokesperson for the Slovak Muslim community turned down our invitation to the roundtable. END NOTE.)

SLOVAK CARDINAL PUBLICLY SUPPORTS TISO

17. (U) On April 22, Cardinal Korec, who retired two years ago from his position overseeing Catholic Church matters across Slovakia and who continues to reside at the diocese in Nitra, praised Father Jozef Tiso in a live interview on the Slovak cable news channel TA3. Korec's remarks about Tiso, who headed the WWII-era Slovak fascist state which deported tens of thousands of Slovak Jews and Roma to their deaths in Nazi camps, were similar to those made by Archbishop Sokol four months ago (ref B). Local newspapers have disagreed with Korec's remarks through their op-ed space but, as of yet, there has been no reaction from government authorities.

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